

Finding of No Significant Impact

Restore Stehekin Valley Road Vehicle Access At Coon Run Mile 9.1 to 10.2

Lake Chelan National Recreation Area

Summary

In October, 2003, the Stehekin Valley Road, in the vicinity of Coon Run was damaged by severe flooding. Since then, the road section between miles 9.1 and 10.2 has been impassable to motor vehicles. This Finding of No Significant Impact documents the decision of the National Park Service (NPS) to reroute the Stehekin Valley Road out of the floodplain in the lower section and to place a bridge over Coon Run to restore vehicle access to Car Wash Falls. Construction is planned to begin summer 2005 with a temporary crossing allowing vehicle access by mid-summer. The bridge is expected to be installed in summer 2006.

Purpose and Need

The purpose of this proposal is to reestablish motor vehicle access between miles 9.1 and 10.2 of the Stehekin Valley Road to provide vehicle access to Carwash Falls. This project is needed to provide visitors with vehicular access to North Cascades National Park, High Bridge Historic District, the upper Stehekin River, trailheads and campgrounds along the upper Stehekin Valley Road. Motor vehicle access to the upper Stehekin Valley Road will enhance the visitor experience by reducing travel time and make the remote upper valley accessible to people who are not able to reach the area by bike, foot, or horse.

Management Alternative Selected for Implementation

Of the 4 alternatives analyzed in the EA, the NPS preferred alternative (Alternative D. Construct an upper road reroute around the Coon Run washout) will be implemented. This alternative is unchanged from the description that appeared in the EA. A reroute of 3,600 feet would be constructed from milepost 9.1. It would climb to the edge of a debris cone, and traverse the terrace above the floodplain for 3,200 feet. The road would cross Coon Creek and the associated wetland and would connect with the existing Stehekin Valley Road up valley of the Coon Run washout.

Road construction on the terrace would involve the removal of an estimated 150 trees, greater than 6 inches in diameter. Most of the trees to be removed are Douglas-fir. Ponderosa pine will be avoided where possible. Many of these small diameter trees (under 18 inches in diameter) are already scheduled to be removed for the forest fuel reduction program. Trees larger than 24 inches in diameter would be avoided by the reroute. Culverts would be installed across 3 seasonal drainages, and approximately 1,000 cubic yards of gravel would be added to the new road surface. The gravel would be barged from down lake. The road reroute would require a 300 foot section of the Bullion trail to be relocated away from the road.

In summer 2005 a temporary culvert, 7 feet in diameter, would be installed across Coon Creek. The approaches would be excavated 10 feet on the down valley side and filled 10 feet on the up valley side to allow vehicles to cross the creek safely. The down valley terrace cut for the approach would provide fill

for the up valley approach. In summer 2006 the temporary culvert would be removed and a bridge would be installed across Coon Creek and the adjacent wetland. The bridge supports would be pre-cast concrete placed on both sides of Coon Creek.

A total of 3,800 feet of abandoned road would be rehabilitated and returned to its natural condition. Of the rehabilitated road sections, 600 feet would be within the Coon Run floodplain, 2,200 feet would be within the lower washout floodplain, and the remaining in upland forest. A total of 3,000 cubic yards of fill would be placed in the Coon Run floodplain. There would be a net reduction of 200 feet of road from current length.

Mitigation Measures

The following mitigation measures to reduce the impact of the action on the environment will be implemented:

Resource	Mitigation	Responsible Division
Geology & Soils	Steep cutbanks and bridge approaches will be revegetated and terraced to prevent erosion	Maintenance and Resource Mgmt.
	Excavated soil material will be salvaged and used as fill in the up valley bridge approach	Maintenance
Hydrology & River Processes	Bridge design and culverts placed along the up valley bridge approach will allow floodwaters to flow unimpeded	Maintenance
Hydrology	The existing culvert in the old road alignment will be removed to allow unrestricted flow and remove unnatural materials.	Maintenance
Water Quality	Silt fences, straw bales or other BMP will be implemented to insure that fine sediments do not enter the Stehekin River	Maintenance, Resource Mgmt.
Vegetation	Park staff will monitor the site annually for noxious weed infestation	Resource Mgmt
	The reroute would be aligned to avoid removal of trees not previously identified for removal in the fuel reduction project. Trees about 24" dbh would not be removed and ponderosa pine would be avoided if possible	Maintenance, Resource Mgmt.
Hydrology/Wildlife	Material used to construct the temporary crossing of Coon Creek (geotec fabric, fill, culvert) will be removed prior to bridge installation	Maintenance
Wildlife, Geology & Soils	Abandoned road sections will be scarified and rehabilitated with native materials	Maintenance, Resource Mgmt.

Other Management Alternatives Considered in the EA

Alternative A. No Action – Do Not Provide Motor Vehicle Access Above 9.1 Mile (Environmentally Preferred Alternative)

This “No Action” alternative is required by NPS policies as a means for comparing the impacts of other “action” alternatives against a common baseline. Under this alternative, the damaged sections of the

Stehekin Valley Road between miles 9.1 and 10.2 would not be repaired or maintained. The road would be officially closed at 9.1 mile. The lower washout would flood during high water events (7,000 cfs). Effects of high water on the lower washout may vary with river changes upstream. The Coon Run washout would be inundated during most of the year when water levels are higher than 500 cfs. The abandoned 3,900 feet of abandoned road would naturally rehabilitate under the no action alternative. There is potential for the Stehekin River to change course and remove the road completely or move to the other side of the valley allowing motor vehicle access to resume through the floodplain. Under this alternative, future vehicle access would be prohibited but would be reassessed in response to future river dynamics.

This alternative is the environmentally preferred alternative because it would have the least biological and physical impact and best protects, preserves, and enhances historic, cultural and natural resources. This alternative would result in the least short-term and long-term adverse impacts to the biological and physical environment compared to the other “action” alternatives since it causes the least amount of disturbance. From mile 9.1 to approximately mile 9.5 and at Coon Run, the road would no longer occupy the floodplain or wetlands. There would be no impact on vegetation, geology, riparian areas and wetlands from new road and bridge construction in areas that are largely undisturbed at present. Restricting vehicle access beyond mile 9.1 would reduce human impacts on the resources up valley of the road closure.

Alternative B. Construct a Lower Reroute Around the Coon Run Washout

Under this alternative, a short reroute of 900 feet would be constructed along the top of the bench above the Coon Run washout. The reroute would follow the existing road through the lower washout to about mile 9.6 then climb the lower terrace above Coon Run washout, and follow the bench contour upstream along Coon Run. The road would cross Coon Creek and the associated wetland and would connect with the existing Stehekin Valley Road up valley of the washout. This reroute option would meet the existing Stehekin Valley Road again up valley of the floodplain.

Road construction of the 900 foot reroute on the terrace would involve the removal of an estimated 100 trees, greater than 6 inches in diameter. To prevent flood damage, the existing road through the lower washout would be elevated 3 feet with fill from the Company Creek gravel pit.

In the Coon Run section, a bridge would be installed across Coon Creek and the adjacent wetland. The bridge supports would be pre-cast concrete placed on both sides of the Coon Run waterway. The bridge approaches would be excavated 10 feet on the down valley side and filled 10 feet on the up valley side to allow vehicles to cross the creek safely. The down valley terrace cut for the bridge approach would provide fill for the up valley bridge approach.

A total of 800 feet of abandoned road in the Coon Run washout would be rehabilitated and returned to its natural state. Of the rehabilitated road sections, 600 feet would be in the Coon run floodplain and 200 feet would be upland forest between the reroute and Coon Run. A total of 3,000 cubic yards of fill would be placed in the Coon Run floodplain with this alternative. An additional 3,600 cubic yards of fill would be placed to elevate the existing road in the lower washout floodplain. There would be a net gain of 100 feet of new road from current length.

Alternative C. Construct an Intermediate Road Reroute Around the Coon Run Washout

Under this alternative, an intermediate reroute of 3,500 feet would be constructed from mile 9.2. The road would pass through 1,500 feet of the lower washout floodplain, and then traverse on the terrace above for 1,600 feet. The road would cross Coon Creek and the associated wetland and would connect with the existing Stehekin Valley Road up valley of the floodplain.

Road construction on the terrace would involve the removal of an estimated 150 trees, greater than 6 inches in diameter and the addition of 450 cubic yards of gravel to the new road surface. Construction of a new elevated road through the lower washout floodplain would require the addition of 2,500 cubic yards of gravel barged from a down lake source.

In the Coon Run section, a bridge would be installed across Coon Creek and the adjacent wetland. The bridge supports would be pre-cast concrete placed on both sides of the Coon Run waterway. The bridge approaches would be excavated 10 feet on the down valley side and filled 10 feet on the up valley side to allow vehicles to cross the creek safely. The down valley terrace cut for the bridge approach would provide fill for the up valley bridge approach.

A total of 2,200 feet of abandoned road in the lower washout floodplain and 600 feet of abandoned road in the Coon Run washout floodplain would be rehabilitated and returned to a natural condition. A total of 5,500 cubic yards of fill would be put into both floodplains (3,000 cubic yards in Coon Run floodplain and 2,500 cubic yards in the lower washout floodplain). There would be a net loss of 300 feet of road from current length.

Alternatives Considered But Rejected

Fill and raise the roadway through the Coon Run floodplain

This alternative was rejected due to impacts on the floodplain, Stehekin River dynamics, water quality and aquatic species. Future flooding events could erode and remove this type of structure.

Build a bridge to span the entire Coon Run floodplain area (approximately 700 feet)

This alternative was rejected due to the potential for the floodplain to grow in the Coon Run area making the bridge obsolete. The river is so dynamic that a bridge could be removed or impacted by floodwaters and/or large woody debris. The bridge supports and installation would impact aquatic species and river dynamics. This alternative would be very costly.

Manipulate the Stehekin River to flow through the abandoned channel

Large machinery would be used to remove the gravel bar that is directing the river into the Coon Run area. This alternative was rejected as it is against NPS policy and the GMP which state that the NPS will protect natural river dynamics and floodplain areas. It is doubtful that the NPS could receive permits from the State Department of Fish and Wildlife or the U.S. Corps of Engineers for this alternative. The NPS is also charged with maintaining good water quality and protecting endangered species and habitat. These resources would be adversely affected by this action. Even if this alternative were viable, the river processes upstream might rebuild the gravel bar with the next high water event.

Public Review

A public scoping letter was sent out for a thirty day review in January 2005. Twelve comments were received (ten were sent by email). Nine letters favored restoring motor vehicle access through the Coon Run section. One letter favored closing the upper road. Two letters asked the park to assess the impacts and find the best solution. Five of the letters favoring access stated that the road should be hardened and raised in its current corridor through the Coon Run washout. The remaining four letters favored a long-term sustainable solution that would take into consideration impacts on the river, floodplain, and wildlife in the area.

The EA was available for public comment from April 15, 2005 through May 16, 2005. The EA was sent to 205 potentially interested parties, including conservation groups, Stehekin residents and property

owners, and relevant government agencies. Copies were also sent to public libraries in Chelan and Wenatchee. A news release was sent to area newspapers, and an announcement was posted on the park website and on a public bulletin board in Stehekin. In addition it was entered in the NPS online public comment system (PEPC).

Twenty-seven public comments were received. Four of the comments were made online using the NPS online public comment system (PEPC). Twenty-five respondents favored rebuilding the road in the Coon Run area and 11 specifically favored the NPS preferred alternative, alternative D. None of the comments identified additional substantive issues or potential significant impacts.

Agency Consultation

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) - An assessment of potential impacts to federally listed species was included in the EA and a Biological Assessment was prepared for FWS review. We determined that the management alternative selected for implementation would have no effect on gray wolf, grizzly bear, Canada lynx, Pacific fisher, California wolverine, western gray squirrel, Townsend's big-eared bat, bald eagle, northern goshawk, golden eagle, merlin, flammulated owl, Vaux's swift, Lewis' woodpecker, black-backed woodpecker, pileated woodpecker, western toad, or Columbia spotted frog. Further, implementation of the proposal may affect but is not likely to adversely affect bull trout and the northern spotted owl. The FWS concurred with these determinations.

U.S. Army, Corps of Engineers (COE) - Debbie Knaub, COE, was consulted regarding potential impacts to Coon Creek from construction of a crossing (temporary and permanent). NPS conducted a site visit with the Ms. Knaub in summer 2004. A detailed application was submitted and approval for construction of the crossing is pending.

Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) - Bob Steele, Area Habitat Biologist, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) was consulted regarding potential impacts to aquatic resources from construction of the Coon Creek crossing (temporary and permanent). WDFW reviewed the EA and concurred that construction of a bridge over Coon Creek is the most appropriate long-term course of action for protection of aquatic resources. NPS conducted a site visit with Mr. Steele in summer 2004. During that site visit, the Coon Creek crossing site was evaluated and suggestions were offered to minimize impacts. A detailed application was submitted and a hydraulic project approval for construction of the crossing is pending.

Why the Selected Alternative will not have a Significant Effect

- Minor, short-term adverse impact to soils due to erosion on steep terrace cutbank. Minor, long-term adverse impact by compaction of soils in the new roadbed section. Moderate, long-term adverse impact on soils from excavation of approximately 3,000 cubic yards of the terrace and placement of 3,000 cubic yards of fill in the Coon Run floodplain. Moderate long-term beneficial impact on soils due to the restoration of soil processes along the 3,800 foot section of rehabilitated abandoned road.
- Potential minor, short-term adverse impact on the hydrology of Coon Creek from construction of the temporary crossing and permanent bridge and approaches. Moderate, long-term beneficial impact on hydrology by the removal of road and culverts in the Coon Run washout and lower washout.
- Moderate, long-term adverse impact of placing fill in 1,725 square feet of wetlands for the up valley bridge approach. Moderate, long-term beneficial impact to wetlands through the restoration of natural wetland process of the abandoned 600 feet of road through the Coon Run washout.

- Potential minor, short-term adverse impact to the floodplain upstream of Coon Run caused by the installation of the temporary and permanent crossing and approaches. Major, long-term beneficial impact to the Coon Run and lower washout floodplains by removing 2,800 feet of road which will restore natural hydrological and ecological processes.
- Negligible to minor, short-term adverse impact on water quality due to erosion on the steep terrace cutbank or crossing approaches. Minor, long-term beneficial impact on water quality since cars will no longer be traveling through the inundated section of Coon Run washout.
- Since there would be no increase in development and the road would be moved farther from the river there would be a positive, long-term impact on eligibility of the Stehekin River for designation as a Wild and Scenic river.
- Minor, short-term adverse impact to air quality from equipment exhaust and dust during construction. Minor, long-term adverse impact to air quality since the road would be passable to shuttlebus and all passenger vehicles resulting in more traffic (exhaust and air-borne dust) in the upper valley.
- Negligible, long-term impact to vegetation, since many of the approximately 150 trees greater than 6 inches in diameter to be removed for the road construction were scheduled to be cut as part of the forest fuel reduction program. Many of these small diameter trees (under 18 inches in diameter) are already scheduled to be removed for the forest fuel reduction program. Trees larger than 24 inches in diameter would be avoided by the reroute. Potential minor, long-term adverse impact to vegetation from exotic weed invasions in the disturbed construction zones. Moderate, long-term beneficial impact to vegetation from the revegetation of 3,800 feet of abandoned road.
- Minor, short-term adverse impact to wildlife in the vicinity from disturbance associated with the road construction. May affect, not likely to adversely affect federally listed spotted owl and bull trout. Moderate, long-term beneficial impact to wildlife due to the increased habitat from the revegetation of 3,800 feet of abandoned road. Moderate, long-term beneficial impact on aquatic species from the restoration of river processes.
- Moderate, long-term beneficial and adverse impact to visitor and recreation experience since providing easier access to the upper valley will result in more people being in the area.
- Moderate, long-term beneficial impact to access and transportation in the upper valley by providing vehicular access around the Coon Run washout to High Bridge for all vehicles including shuttlebuses and to Car Wash falls for all vehicles except shuttlebuses. Moderate, long-term beneficial impact to access and transportation during flooding by providing vehicular access around the lower washout floodplain.
- Potential, moderate, long-term beneficial impact to the local economy since easier access and restored local tours may attract more visitors.
- Other CEQ significance criteria are not triggered, including:
 - Public health and safety are not compromised;
 - No unique characteristics or ecological critical areas in the geographic area are impacted;
 - The potential effects to the quality of the human environment are not highly controversial;
 - There are no significant indirect or cumulative effects or connected actions foreseen;
 - No unique or unknown consequences or uncertain effects will occur; and

- No violation of federal, state, or local law will result from implementing the alternative selected.

Impairment

The impacts resulting from the selected alternatives will not impair NRA resources necessary to fulfill specific purposes identified in the enabling legislation. The impacts documented in the EA as summarized above will not affect resources or values key to the natural or cultural integrity of the recreation area or alter opportunities for enjoyment of the recreation area. The alternatives will not impair NRA resources and will not violate the NPS organic Act.

Conclusion

Based on information contained in the Environmental Assessment as summarized above, the National Park Service has determined that the proposed actions do not constitute a major federal action that would significantly affect the quality of the human environment. This determination is based upon the environmental analysis, the ability of the mitigation measures to reduce or eliminate impact, and the favorable nature of public comment on this project. The proposed action is not without precedent, nor is similar to an action which normally requires an environmental impact statement. Therefore, in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 and regulations of the Council on Environmental Quality (40 CFR 1508.9), an environmental impact statement will not be prepared.

Recommended: William F. Paleck 6-09-05
 William F. Paleck Date
 Superintendent, North Cascades National Park Service Complex

Approved: Cicely A. Muldoon 30 June 2005
 for Jonathan B. Jarvis Date
 Regional Director, Pacific-West Region